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THE ATLANTIC EXPRESS AND THE FUTURE BRITISH PORT OF ARRIVAL.

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NE of the great problems just now exercising the minds of the world of shipping is the future Atlantic route. Everything appears to be tending to quick passages, quick delivery of mails, and the shortest possible sea route. A great impetus towards these ends has lately been given by Canada, which country has offered a subsidy of no less than £150,000 for a line of mail steamers to carry the mails between Canada, Great Britain, and France, and thus—with their Pacific railroad—make a regular and express through connection *via* Canada between this country and China, taking Japan *en route*. One of the chief matters requiring consideration in connection with this scheme is the choice of a British port or ports of arrival and departure, and we see Liverpool, Milford, Bristol, Southampton and Plymouth anxiously pressing their claims and, naturally, indulging in a good amount of special pleading. With regard to the other side of the ocean, it would appear that Halifax in winter and Quebec in summer are the chosen ports. The question is, "What British port is to be adopted?"

The first question is, "What is wanted?" We think that future Atlantic traffic requires a port in this country similar to Halifax or Quebec—a port allowing for the shortest possible sea passage and the quickest delivery of passengers and mails, but not necessarily a port of discharge. The mail and passenger traffic are the two great and important branches of Atlantic trade, ordinary freight takes a third place. For the most expeditious handling of these two important matters it is requisite that the port of the future—and it must come soon—should have the *absolutely necessary* advantages of being *accessible at all times, quite independent of tides or sea gates*, and able to land mails and passengers without transshipment or delay of any kind. The case of Liverpool shows that things are tending this way. Because that port is blocked by a bar it has already lost some of its Atlantic trade. It seems to us that Southampton is only a step in the direction

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towards the final goal. Have we then a port which enjoys these advantages and is also in a suitable position? In answer to this momentous question, Milford will occur to everyone.

Of all the competing ports, there is only one which is *always accessible, and where a large Atlantic Liner may steam up to her pier, and let her passengers walk on shore into a railway carriage.* That one port is Milford. Will Atlantic expresses ever be enticed to use that port? We think that, in time, they will have to; and that, if the Canadian Government chose that port of departure, and were able—as is claimed for Milford—to save 24 to 36 hours between London and Chicago, they would at once command the cream of the traffic.

A deputation lately waited upon Sir Charles Tupper, to urge the claims of Milford. The High Commissioner expressed himself as greatly struck by the arguments presented to him, and the chief objection occurring to him seemed to be that, as these Canadian steamers are to go on to a French port, Milford would be out of the route. Let us consider this point. Queenstown has been the mail port hitherto; let us suppose this place were chosen instead of Milford. After the mails and passengers were landed the steamer bound on for France would be further away from the Longships (the English Channel entrance point) than if at Milford. The full gain in time that Queenstown could claim over Milford would be about three hours; and this, after the mails and passengers were discharged, would mean nothing at all. Besides, it appears necessary that the vessels should call at an English port on their way to France on account of present existing Customs' arrangements between the two countries. This being so, suppose that Southampton were chosen, it would no doubt be favourable to the delivery of ordinary goods, but at the expense of a loss in time of at least eight hours in landing of mails and passengers, not taking any note of the extra risk of running at express speed up the English Channel to that port, which is a matter for serious consideration, especially as of the two channels, English and Irish, the English is decidedly the worse for fog.

But, supposing Milford were chosen, there are some matters requiring attention.

First, the Smalls Light must be improved, and, if possible, a more powerful and frequent fog-signal placed there, which should be sounded whenever the horizon contracts to one mile. Coal must be cheapened at Milford f.o.b., and the run by rail to London and our other large towns must be materially

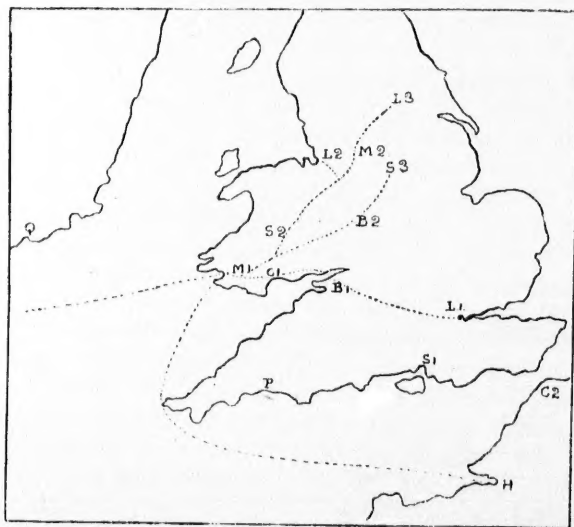
quicken. If it is to be made a port of discharge, railway rates to London must be made equal in some way so as to compete with Southampton.

But it is probable that the powerful claims of Milford are in the direction of mails and passengers. The Atlantic express of the future will not trouble herself about ordinary freight, and Milford's claims as an ordinary port of discharge will depend on the cheapness of distribution. It is scarcely too much to say that were Milford now in possession of a large over-sea trade and every facility for quick despatch, its position would be unassailable and unquestionable; and even now, considering our great towns as a whole, it would appear that for a *general* distributing centre, Milford is in a remarkably good place. A glance at the accompanying sketch railway map shows at a glance its infinite superiority in this particular to Southampton:—

MILFORD'S POSITION WITH REGARD TO THE RAILWAY SYSTEM OF THE KINGDOM.

Milford 277 from London.

" 210 " Manchester.
" 247 " Leeds.



M 1. Milford.
M 2. Manchester.

L 1. London.
L 2. Liverpool.
L 3. Leeds.

B 1. Bristol.
B 2. Birmingham.

C 1. Cardiff.
C 2. Calais.
H. Havre.

S 1. Southampton.
S 2. Shrewsbury.
S 3. Sheffield.

P. Plymouth.
Q. Queenstown.

With the one exception of London, it is nearer to all the large towns of the kingdom; whilst Welsh coal is naturally far cheaper at Milford than Southampton, and can be cheapened. Milford is also a port that can be entered at any time, except in dense fog, and, should it become an important place, a proper system of buoyage would make it practicable in the thickest weather. Southampton cannot claim a similar advantage at equal risk.

Once a steamer is past the Smalls she is out of all traffic, and the risk of collision is gone; but a vessel running up Channel for Southampton has that danger present with her the whole way up. The sea route to Milford is 180 miles shorter than to Liverpool, and 200 miles shorter than to Southampton. Here at once is a gain of at least ten hours, and Milford claims a gain over Queenstown—for the delivery of the English mails—of at least five hours. When one comes to think of it, it seems rather strange that with Milford in existence we should for so many years have been content to use Queenstown as a final port of departure for the Atlantic mails. Using Milford we should gain in time—should be able to post letters some five hours later in London—whilst passengers would be spared the cross Channel journey and the Irish railway trip from Dublin to Queenstown.

It would appear then that if the G.W. Railway is sufficiently wide awake, Milford has a very good chance. It *can* be made the future Atlantic express port, but this depends upon the adoption of an advanced and liberal policy. If this be so, is there not a good opening for far-seeing business men? The Canadian Pacific Railway have their own steamers connecting their railway system with the "far" East, which through them has become "near." Could not the Great Western Railway and the Milford Docks Company join forces, take up the contract in connection with their own undertakings, and make a really good thing of it? To dispassionate outsiders it would appear feasible; in fact, one scarcely sees why the "Canadian Pacific," with their own steamers connecting on the Pacific sea-board, should not start an Atlantic Line also. They would then be in a strong position to compete with such big lines as the P. and O. for the Indian and China passenger traffic, and would probably progress until passengers could start westward and, with only one transshipment and without a single cab-fare, "put a girdle round the earth."

As a port of departure westward, Milford may, possibly, not appear so superior; for this purpose Plymouth might perhaps compete, or even Southampton. That is also a matter for consideration, in which perhaps the Postmaster-General will have his say. But if quick delivery is to be aimed at, and the port chosen by which the *quickest* delivery can be accomplished, the matter is already settled—Milford is the place beyond doubt. If, again, passengers are considered, it may be taken for granted that if a port can tempt Atlantic express steamers to call and can provide a wharf where the steamer lies alongside, and where the main line railway carriages run right up alongside of her, *that* will tempt passengers more than anything else. If offered the choice (all other things being equal) between such an arrangement and the procedure at Liverpool, who would hesitate? The arrival at Lime Street by a train badly timed, the rush for baggage, the fight for a cab, resulting in getting a damp, mouldy-smelling hack, the muddy drive to the landing stage, the walk down to the tender, the miserable journey into mid-stream. Do we not all know what a delightful experience this is on a cold, rainy day? and would we not all rather get into a comfortable carriage at London, Birmingham or Leeds knowing that we need not move until we alighted under cover at the wharf where our Atlantic express was waiting to receive us? With such arrangements as these we could start on our trip in the worst day that ever blew out of the heavens without wanting even an umbrella! The luxurious traveller of these days appreciates such comforts, and if he can find a port which offers them, will use it if the steamers sailing from thence are as good as elsewhere.

Milford, being able to offer all these advantages, will be a hard enemy to fight if she fights her own battle judiciously, and is wide enough awake to see that she offers other and necessary temptations also; amongst which are better lighting and buoyage of her harbour and approaches, cheaper coal, and good express through rail communication with all our large towns. To become the future Atlantic port of departure for the Canadian express is worth bidding high for.

One other question remains—How does the matter look from a nautical point of view?

As we are dealing with the Atlantic express this is also a momentous question.

Now the *only* two dangers Atlantic liners have to encounter when in the vicinity of our coasts, are collision and stranding.

With regard to the first of these, the risk on a run from the S.W. point of Ireland to Milford is very considerably less than in a run from that point to either Liverpool, Bristol, or Southampton; and with this further advantage that, when nearing the port, the risk is reduced to a minimum; whereas, in the cases of Southampton and Bristol, the risk increases as the ports are approached. In the case of Milford, an approaching steamer would, for *half-an-hour* before coming in with the Smalls, cross the up and down traffic of the Irish Channel. In the case of Bristol, vessels would also cross this, and would then have the up and down traffic from Cardiff, Barry, Swansea, Newport, and the other Bristol Channel ports to guard against. Whilst the Southampton steamer would, besides crossing the Irish Channel traffic like the other two, have the large and dangerous English Channel traffic, and the many fishing fleets to keep clear of. Liverpool is, of course, in a similar position. In the matter of freedom from risk of collision, there the Milford track is at a great advantage.

And now as to stranding. As in an express service the risk of collision is greater, so also with stranding. It may be assumed that, with the smart and careful navigation exercised on board such vessels as we are considering, a run of 100 miles can be made with great accuracy. Now as with Liverpool, so with Milford; the Irish land would be made first. The distance from the Tuskar to the Smalls is only short, and in the thickest weather a smartly navigated steamer would not, at the end of that run, be more than two miles out of her course, probably less. If this be so, the Smalls would be easily picked up, and from these to Milford Heads the way is clear. We have already said that a better and more frequent sounding fog-signal should be placed on the Smalls; as a suggestion, an explosive signal fired from the lighthouse might supplement the one fired from the high elevation. A steamer can safely approach the rock within half a mile; in fact, the Smalls stand to Milford as the Eddystone does to Plymouth—a beacon of nature's providing to guide vessels in.

Have any of the other ports such an easy approach? Certainly not. And in fog it will be dangerously reckless to attempt to approach Southampton at anything like the speed at which

Milford might be approached; the same may be said of Liverpool.

In these two directions, then, Milford is at an advantage. One matter requires care in approaching the harbour, and that is the strong tidal stream; but as the ebb and flood run in exactly opposite directions and turn with H.W. Dover, there is not much intricacy in making a sensible allowance for their action. And here we may leave the matter. It is not always that commerce is alive to the necessity of being up to the times in the choice of a port. But taking the late examples of Tilbury and Barry, it would seem as though access at all times of tide were supposed in these days to be a necessity. In the choice of an Atlantic port it is a vital point, and in the near future passengers will insist upon transshipment and its inconveniences being done away with.
